God was in Christ
(Incarnation) 9/25/60

IN A BOOK BEVIS: THE STORY OF A BOY, RICHARD JEFFERIES BRINGS TO THE SURFACE A MISUNDERSTANDING THAT HAS PLAGUED CHRISTIANITY FOR CENTURIES AND IN MANY WAYS STILL DOES. HE SAYS OF THE BOY--"THE CURCIFIXION HURT HIS FEELINGS VERY MUCH: THE CRUEL NAILS: THE UNFEELING SPEAR: HE LOOKED AT THE PICTURE FOR A LONG TIME AND THEN TURNED THE PAGE SAYING, IF GOD HAD BEEN THERE, HE WOULD NOT HAVE LET THEM DO IT."

IF GOD HAD BEEN THERE! IN THIS STATEMENT THE BOY REFERS TO AND COMPLETELY MISSES THE GLORY AND THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION. BY SAYING IF GOD HAD BEEN THERE THE BOY STRIPS CHRISTIANITY OF ITS CUTTING EDGE--BECAUSE INDEED GOD WAS THERE.

WHEN WE EMBRACE CHRISTIANITY AS OUR WAY OF TRUTH, WHEN WE CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS, WHEN WE COME HERE ON SUNDAYS TO WORSHIP, WE ARE MAKING THE MOST RADICAL CLAIM EVER EXPERIENCED IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. BY TAKING THE NAME CHRISTIANS WE ARE AFFIRMING OUR BELIEF THAT THE CARPENTER FROM NAZARETH WAS SOMEHOW ONE AND THE SAME WITH GOD. THIS IS NO ORDINARY STATEMENT AS YOU CAN READILY SEE. WHAT IF INDIA WOULD SUDDENLY PROCLAIM THAT GHANDI WAS DIVINE, THAT HE WAS ULTIMATE DIVINITY WALKING AMONG MEN IN THE 20th CENTURY. NO DOUBT SOME OF YOU WOULD THINK IT IRREVERENT AND BLASPHEMOUS, OTHERS WOULD CASUALLY LAUGH IT OFF.

AND YET, AS CHRISTIANS YOU ARE AFFIRMING JUST THIS SAME THING ABOUT A MAN CALLED JESUS.

FOR SOME REASON THE ABSOLUTELY MIRACULOUS ASPECT OF THE INCARNATION SEEMS TO BE DULLED IN OUR LITURGY, AND OUR CONVERSATION. OTHER FACETS OF OUR FAITH SEEM TO OVERSHADOW IT WHEN WE DO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS IT. WITH THIS IN MIND I HAVE DECIDED TO APPROACH THE SUBJECT OF THE INCARNATION THIS MORNING, IN HOPES THAT MORE EMPHASIS ON ITS IMPORTANCE WILL REESTABLISH IT AS THE VERY CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH.

I THINK PERHAPS THE INEVITABLE HAS OCCURED IN OUR THINKING ABOUT THE INCARNATION—WE ARE SO FAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT AS WE HEAR IT VOICED THAT WE HAVE LONG NEGLECTED TO DIG MENTALLY INTO ITS DEPTHS, SEARCH FOR THE MEANING AND TEVELATION THAT ARE TO BE FOUND THERE. I AM A LITTLE DOUBTFUL WHETHER CONGREGATIONS ARE STIRRED TO THE QUICK WHEN THEY MAKE CREEDAL AFFIRMATION OF INCARRNATION. I THINK THE INCARNATION, ALONG WITH MUCH ELSE THAT IS ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIANITY HAS BECOME THE VICTIM OF SPIRITUAL, MENTAL AND INTELLECTUAL APATHY--MY PURPOSE HERE, HOWEVER IS NOT TO DELIVER A PEP TALK BUT TO RAISE AN ISSUE, HOPING MY THOUGHTS WILL PROMPT YOU TO COME TO GRIPS WITH IT YOURSELVES.

BESIDES THIS APATHY WITH WHICH THE INCARNATION HAS HAD TO CONTEND THERE HAVE BEEN OUTRIGHT SUBTLE AND SOME NOT SO SUBTLE STANDS AGAINST IT. PROBABLY THE MOST FAMILIAR ONE IS THAT OF THE MODERNIST, LIBERAL OR HUMANIST. THIS GROUP, OR

DENOMINATION AS UNITARIANS ARE FALACIOUSLY CALLED, OUTRIGHTLY DENY THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST. IN THEIR MINDS HE WAS A GOOD MAN, A VERY GOOD MAN, THE BEST MAN THAT EVER LIVED. HIS MORAL DEMANDS ARE STILL UNEQUALLED, HIS SOCIAL REFORMS STILL THE OBJECT OF ENLIGHTENED PEOPLE EVERYWHERE. BUT HIS ONENESS WITH GOD, IN THE MINDS OF THE HUMANIST IS JUST A MERE OUTGROWTH, AN EXAGGERATION TO ATTRACT ATTENTION. FOR THESE PEOPLE CHRISTIANITY IS FOUND IN THE WORDS OF JESUS, THE SERMON ON THE MT. IS THE WAY TO SALAVATION. UNFORTUNATELY THIS VIEW IS FASHIONABLE IN ACADEMIC CIRCLES--PARTICULARLY AMONG STUDENTS. THE COLLEGE STUDENT, OR ADULT, WHO FOR THE FIRST TIME IS EXPERIENCING AN INTELLECTUAL SHAKEUP INEVITABLY DRIFTS TOWARDS THIS WATERED DOWN VERSION OF CHRISTIANITY. WHEN BELIEFS ARE DOUBTED, AND AT SOME TIME IN EVERY LIFE THEY MUST BE, PEOPLE LET THIS "GOOD MAN" TYPE OF CHRISTIANITY BECOME DOMINANT AND FOR MANY THIS IS THEIR CREDO FOR LIFE.

NEEDLESS TO SAY THIS SIMPLY IS NOT CHRISTIAN. ~~I STATED LAST SUNDAY~~ MANY MEN HAVE LED EQUALLY AS GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS A LIFE AS JESUS, OBEYING HIS DEMANDS illustrate AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IS NOT ENOUGHT TO MAKE A MAN CHRISTIAN. THE FACT THAT SHEDS ILLUMINATION ON ALL HE SAID IS THE FACTTHAT HE WAS THE INCARNATION OF GOD--GOD IN THE FLESH AND ANY HESITANCY TO ACCEPT THIS IS A DENIAL OF PART AND PARCEL

OF

OF CHRISTIANITY.

ON THE OTHERHAND MEN /////// ARE AT TIMES SO JOYFUL AT BEING ABLE TO TAKE PART IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, ARE SO ELATED THAT THE WORD BECAME FLESH THAT THEY TEND TO FORGET OUR CHIEF END, THAT OF WORSHIPPING AND ADORING GOD. PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS THAT PUT SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON BEING SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB SEEM TO IGNORE THE GOD WHO WAS IN JESUS. PRAYERS, GOSPEL SONGS AND EVEN THE CALL TO COME FORWARD ARE LOADED WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT JESUS, THE SAVIOR WILL SOMEHOW INTERCEDE ON THE PART OF SINNERS BEFORE THE FATHER GOD. IF WE TRULY BELIEVE THAT FATHER AND SON ARE ONE, THAT JESUS WAS THE CHRSIT, GOD INCARNATE THIS TYPE OF EMPHASIS MUST BE REALIZED AS /////// BORDERING ON DISTORTION OF THE GOSPEL.

OUR CREEDS, THROUGH THEIR WORDING AND BY NO MEASURE THE INTENTION OF THEIR AUTHORS SEEM TO IMPLY TWO COMPLETELY INDIVIDUAL BEINGS. WHEN WE SAY JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD, ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER, THE NATURAL IMPRESSION IS THAT OF TWO BEINGS, JESUS ON THE RIGHT--NOT THE VERY DEEP AND UNIQUE ONENESS THAT WAS THE INTENT OF THE WRITERS.

OUR POPULAR TITLE FOR JESUS AS SON OF GOD ADDS TO THE CONFUSION OF THE ALREADY ABORTED INCARNATION CONCEPT. WHEN THE PHRASE SON OF GOD WAS COINED IN THE

FIRST CENTURY IT HAD COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEANING THAN IT DOES NOW. BLOOD LINES, FAMILY LINEAGE WERE STRESSED HEAVILY, A SON WAS ALWAYS LIKE HIS FATHER. JEREMIAH, IN DENYING HIS CALLING BEFORE A GROUP OF TORMENTORS CRIED, "I AM NOT A PROPHET, OR THE SON OF A PROPHET." THE POINT IS CLEAR WHEN EARLY CHRISTIANS CALLED JESUS THE SON OG GOD THEY MEANT THAT SOMEHOW THERE WAS--OF THE FATHER IN HIM, AS THE CARPENTERS SON HAS SOME OF THE CARPTENTER IN HIM. BUT THROUGH THE YEARS, FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REAONS THIS CONCEPT HAS BEEN LOST AND I'M AFRAID THAT WHEN WE CALL JESUS THE SON OF GOD WE SOMEWHAT MISS THE POINT.

CHURCH HISTORY CLEARLY SHOWS THAT THE INCARNATION HAS BEEN A STUMBLING BLOCK FOR CHRISTIANS, NOT ONLY RECENTLY BUT FOR CENTURIES. IN THE DAYS WHEN MEN BELIEVED THAT SPIRITS GOOD AND EVIL ROAMED THE EARTH THE FACT THAT A SPIRITUAL BEING HAD BECOME HUMAN WAS HARD TO SWALLOW. JUST AS HARD HEADED, REALISTIC MODERN AMERICANS FIND JESUS DIVINITY HARD TO BELIEVE SO THESE MEN OF A MYSTICAL GENERATION FOUND HIS HUMANITY AN EQUALLY FORMIDABLE OBSTACLE. A SPIRIT COULD INVADE A BODY BUT SURELY NOT BECOME ONE WITH A BODY. IN THE CASE OF JESUS, THESE CHRISTIAN MYSTICS OR SKEPTICS, THOUGHT THE SPIRIT OF GOD HAD INVADED A SOMEWHAT UNREAL BODY AND HAD TAKEN ON SOMEWHAT UNREAL PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS. THE REAL

part of Jesus was THE SPIRITUAL SIDE, THE CHRIST. ONE PARTICULAR GROUP OF THESE MEN CALLED ARIANS AFTER THERE FOUNDER ARIRES, A 4TH CENTURY BISHOP, PICTURED THE CHRIST, THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OBJECTIVELY OBSERVING THE CRUCIFIXION AND AGONY OF THE MAN JESUS FROM A NEARBY HILL. AS YOU CAN SEE JESUS HUMANITY WAS NOT TOO CRUCIAL IN THEIR BRAND OF CHRISTIANITY.

OUR FIRST AFFIRMATION IN THIS CONTEXT IS THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS A MAN. HE WAS BORN, GREW AS ANY NORMAL CHILD WOULD, HE ATE, DRANK, HUNGERED, THIRSTED, BECAME ANGRY, WEPT AND UNDERWENT THE SAME TEMPTATIONS. PERHAPS OUR MOST PRECIOUS SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY TO HIS HUMANITY IS FOUND IN MATT. 11:19 WHERE IS QUOTED AS AN ACCUSATION OF HIS BEING A DRUNKHARD AND A GLUTTON. SURELY HE WAS HUMAN. SIGRIED UNDSET HAS WORDED IT IN A BITING SENTENCE--TO THINK OF JESUS AS A FRAIL AND KINDLY MISSIONARY WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE AS IT REALLY IS: OR AS AN AMIABLE YOUNG PREACHER WITH A SPECIAL TALENT FOR TOUCHING THE HEARS OF WOMEN'S UNIONS IS TO BE SUPREMELY SENTIMENTAL WHEN HE, THE GREAT LOVER OF THE RACE, WAS AS HARD AS NAILS"--HE WAS NOT THE FAR OFF MYSTIC FROM THE GALILEAN HILLS, BUT A PEASANT CARPENTER, WHOSE HANDS WERE CALLOUSED AND BACK MUSCLED FROM RIGOROUS MANUAL LABOR. HE DID NOT COME OF AGE IN A CONVENT BUT IN THE

WORLD, AMONG PEOPLE, TALKING TO THEM, LIVING AMONG THEM--BEING ONE OF THEM AND HE DIED JUST AS THEY DID.

BUT AT THIS POINT WE INSERT OUR RADICAL AND LOGICALLY ABSURD CLAIM--ALL THIS IS TRUE ENOUGH ABOUT HIS BEING HUMAN BUT YET IN HIM MEN HAVE SEEN GOD. IN HIM THE WORD, THE TRUTH, REALITY--HAVE BECOME FLESH.

IN DISCUSSING THE NATURE OF OUR BELIEFS ABOUT JESUS IWOULD LEAVE MANY ENDS UNTIED IF IDID NOT MENTION HIS RELATIONSHIP TO AND PART IN THE TRINITY. THE HOLY TRINITY IS THE CHURCHES ARTICULATION OF ITS BELIEFS ABOUT GOD. THE MEMBERS OF THE TRINITY HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO AS PERSONS, PHASES OF GOD, MODES, ETC., AND THEY ARE ALL IN A SENSE CORRECT. WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE TRINITY WE ARE DESCRIBING THE THREE ASPECTS (I PREFER ASPECTS) OF GOD AS WE KNOW HIM. FIRST GOD THE FATHER, THE VERY CENTER, THE ORIGINATOR OF ALL THAT IS, THE AUTHOR OF ALL NATURE AND BREATHER OF ALL LIFE--THE BEGINNING AND THE END AND THE CENTER OF THE TRINITY. SECONDLY THE HOLY SPIRIT REPRESENTS OUR BELIEF IN A REVEALING GOD, ONE THAT CONTINUOUSLY REVEALS HIMSELF IN NATURE, IN THE PROGRESS OF HISTORY, IN INDIVIDUAL HUMAN LIVES. WHEN WE SPEAK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WE DON'T MEAN THAT GREEN GAS THAT STEALTHILY CREPT THROUGH THE STREETS OF EGYPT IN THE MOVIE THE

TEN COMMANDMENTS--WE MEAN THAT ASPECT OF GOD, THAT CHACTERISTIC OF GOD THAT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS REVEALING, WE MEAN OUR CONFIDENCE IN HIS EVER PRESENT, ETERNAL REVELATION. FINALLY THE RELATIONSHIP OF JESUS TO THE TRINITY IS THAT ASPECT OF GOD THAT WAS REVEALED IN AN ACT--AN ACT IN THE CONFINES OF HISTORY. IN THE JESUS OF NAZARETH GOD TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND BRIDGED THE INSEPARABLE GAP BETWEEN THE SACRED AND PROFANE BETWEEN THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN AND IN HIM APPROACHED MAN, PLEADING TO MAN TO ONLY BELIEVE, TO ACCEPT HIM AS THE ONLY AND ONE GOD.

THE CONCEPT OF THE TRINITY IS CLEVERLY ILLUSTRATED IN AN INCIDENT THAT OCCURED TO A PROFESSOR OF MINE. FILLING A PULPIT IN A SWEDISH LUTHERAN CHURCH THE MAN CONCLUDED HIS SERVICE AND WAS SURPRISED TO SEE THE CONGREGATION REMAINING SEATED. THEN HE REMEMBERED THAT IT IS A CUSTOM IN THE SWEDISH CHURCH FOR THE CONGREGATION TO STAY AFTER CHURCH TO REVIEW THE CATECHISM. BEING UNFAMILAIR WITH THE PEOPLE HE STARTED WITH AN EASY QUESTION—HOW MANY GOD'S ARE THERE? A WOMAN QUICKLY RETORTED--FOUR PASTOR--WOULD YOU NAME THEM? GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT. BUT THAT IS ONLY THREE, WHO IS THE FOURTH. OH! YOU KNOW PASTOR, THE GOOD OLD GOD. IN HER IGNORANCE OF ALL THEOLOGY THIS OLD WOMAN HAD

SOMEHOW GRASPED AN ESSENTIAL TRUTH THAT RINITY OR NO TRINITY, NO MATTER HOW YOU SAY THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, ONE ULTIMATE BEING WHOM WE ~~SHALL~~ WORSHIP.

CHRISTIANITY'S PRIMARY AND FIRST ASSERTION IS THAT OF THE EXISTENCE OF ONE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. THIS AFFIRMATION HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE ANCIENT HEBREW CULTURES AND RITUALS WHEN IT WAS THE MOST HEINIENOUS OF ALL OFFENSES TO WORSHIP ANY DEITY BUT GOD, A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY DEATH. THIS IDEA WAS THE DOMINANT ETHOS IN WHICH JESUS BECAME A MAN, AND TODAY IT IS A ULTIMATE CONCERN. THROUGH THE GLASS OF UNCOMPRISING MONOTHEISM MUST WE LOOK AT JESUS--FOR HE IS THE CONCRETE MANIFESTATION OF DIVINITY. IN HIM THE ONE GOD HAS MADE HIMSELF KNOWN TO MEN FOREVER.

IN RECENT YEARS BIBLICAL SCHOLARS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A SEARCH FOR THE "HISTORICAL JESUS" USING ALL THE MEANS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO RECOVER THE ACTUAL BEHAVIOR, REACTION AND EMOTIONS OF THE MAN IN HSITORY, JESUS OF NAZARETH. WHY? BECAUSE WE ARE REALIZING THAT WHAT THIS MAN DID IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT HE SAID. HIS VERY OCCURENCE IN HISTORY FAR OUTWEIGHTS HIS MORAL IMPERA* TIONS FOR HERE WAS GOD. NOT ONLY WAS GOD PRESENT AT CALVARY HE WAS PERSONALLY INVOLVED.

It is when ~~men~~ we encounter our lord face to face, our God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; when we see God's own revelation in the coming of time & space this is when our Christ-ology becomes significant. Again & this framework we must look at the crucifixion &

~~THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE AND THE CRUCIFIXION STORY ARE NOT THE STORY OF WHAT~~

~~MEN DID TO JESUS OF NAZSRETH BUT THE STORY OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR MAN.~~

the entire life of Jesus Christ. The entire story is not what men did to Jesus but what God has done for men.

DEAR LORD GOD, DESCEND UPON US WE PRAY. OPEN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO THEE, AND GIVE US UNDERSTANDING OF THY MYSTERIOUS AND WONDROUS WORKS. HELP US FIND MEANING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST, HELP US THROUGH HIM TO UNDERSTAND THEE.

AMEN.

BENEDICTION - THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU ALL. AMEN.